



Kern and Pixley National Wildlife Refuges

Planning Update 3

Greetings!

This is the third planning update from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intended to keep you informed about our planning process for the Kern National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

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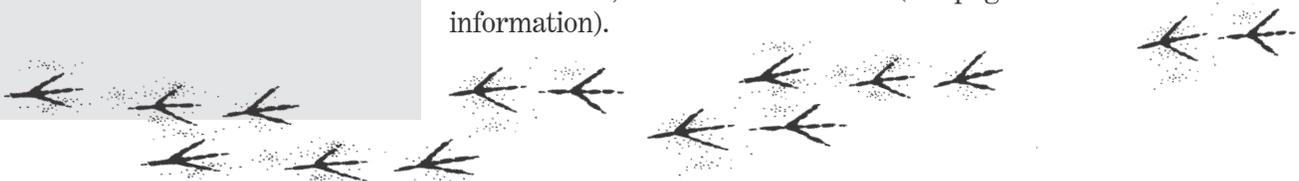


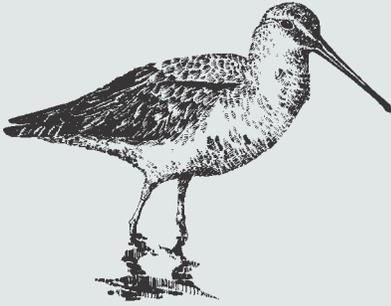
Wetlands at Kern NWR, USFWS

Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan Coming Soon!

Over the past year, the Kern Refuge Complex planning team has been developing and refining management alternatives for Kern and Pixley Refuges. These alternatives were developed with the help of input we received from you during the scoping period. Currently, we are working on putting the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) together. We anticipate sending out the draft CCP/EA in the summer of 2002.

This planning update gives you a preview of what you will find in the draft CCP/EA. The update lists the revised goals and summarizes the management alternatives developed for Kern and Pixley Refuges. Planning Update 1 described the planning process, opportunities for public input, and interim refuge goals. Planning Update 2 summarized the issues and concerns we heard from you during the scoping process. If you would like a copy of Planning Update 1 or 2, please contact David Hardt, the Kern Refuge Complex project leader, or Mark Pelz, the CCP team leader (see page 9 for contact information).





long-billed dowitcher;
Larry Eifert

Refuge Purposes

Kern NWR was established under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act "... for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." (16 U.S.C. § 715d)

Pixley NWR was set aside to provide wintering habitat for migratory birds and protect habitat for the endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The authorities and corresponding purposes for which Pixley NWR was established are: (1) Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act - "... a land-conservation and land-utilization program ..." 7 U.S.C. § 1011; (2) Secretarial Order 2843, dated Nov. 17, 1959 - "... for migratory birds and other wildlife: ..."; and (3) Endangered Species Act of 1973 - "... to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species ... or (B) plants ..." 16 U.S.C. § 1534

Revised Goals for Kern and Pixley Refuges

Based on your input during the scoping process for this CCP/EA, the planning team developed revised goals for Kern and Pixley Refuges. The alternatives described on the following pages are based on these goals. The goals, listed in priority order by refuge, are:

Kern Refuge

Goal 1. Provide high quality wintering and migratory habitat for migratory birds in the southern San Joaquin Valley, with an emphasis on waterfowl and waterbirds.

Goal 2. Protect, preserve, and restore alkali sink scrub, saltbush scrub, iodine bush scrub, and grassland habitats in the southern San Joaquin Valley to contribute to the recovery plan goals for the San Joaquin kit fox, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and Tipton's kangaroo rat.

Goal 3. Restore and maintain a representative example of Tulare Basin grassland, riparian, and sink scrub habitat on Kern Refuge.

Goal 4. Provide visitors with wildlife-dependant recreation, interpretation, and education opportunities that foster an appreciation and understanding of Kern Refuges' unique wildlife and plant communities.

Pixley Refuge

Goal 1. Protect, preserve, and restore alkali sink scrub, saltbush scrub, iodine bush scrub, and grassland habitats in the southern San Joaquin Valley to contribute to the recovery plan goals for the San Joaquin kit fox, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and Tipton's kangaroo rat.

Goal 2. Restore and maintain a representative example of Tulare Basin grassland and riparian habitat on Pixley Refuge.

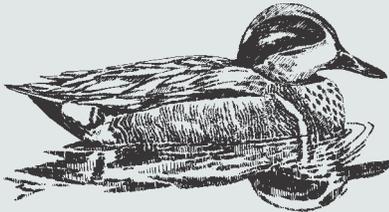
Goal 3. Provide high quality wintering and migratory habitat for migratory birds in the southern San Joaquin Valley, with an emphasis on waterfowl, sandhill cranes, and other waterbirds.

Goal 4. Provide visitors with wildlife-dependant recreation, interpretation, and education opportunities that foster an appreciation and understanding of Pixley Refuges' unique wildlife and plant communities.



Service Develops Draft Management Alternatives for Kern and Pixley Refuges

Over the past year, the Kern Refuge Complex planning team has developed alternatives for managing Kern and Pixley Refuges. We developed these alternatives with the help of comments, concerns, and suggestions we received from you during the public scoping period. Below is a brief description of the draft alternatives for each refuge. Maps on the following pages depict the habitat management and visitor services alternatives for Kern and Pixley Refuges.



teal, Larry Eifert

Kern Refuge

Under **Alternative A**: No Action, the Refuge will continue to be managed as it has in the recent past. In general, management would be guided by the Master Plan completed in 1986. The focus of the Refuge would remain the same: to provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl.

Under **Alternative B**, the Refuge focus would remain the same: to provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl. Under this alternative, management programs for migratory waterfowl would be expanded and improved and hunting opportunities would be substantially increased. The Service would implement the following major new projects/changes under this alternative:

- Rehabilitate Unit 14 to provide 1,200 acres of new moist soil habitat;
- Rehabilitate 1,150 acres of seasonal marsh (Units 7 and 8) to improve water efficiency;
- Plant 5 acres of riparian vegetation along the canal east of Unit 14.
- Open an additional 187 acres (Unit 6b) to free roam hunting and 1,330 acres (Units 5a, 5b, 6a, and 6c) to hunting from 18 new designated blinds; and
- Open the Refuge to hunting on Sundays in addition to current hunt days (Wednesdays and Saturdays).

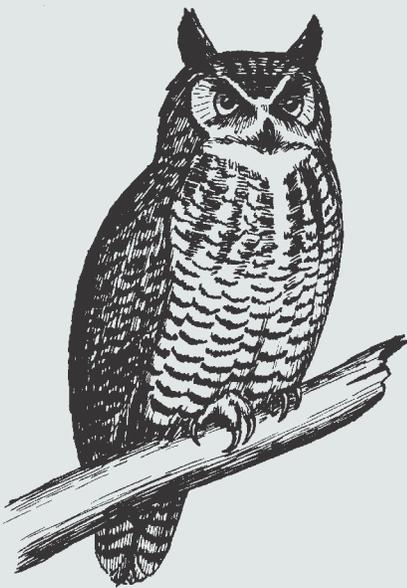
Under **Alternative C**, the Refuge focus would change to providing wintering habitat for migratory birds and contributing to the recovery of targeted special status species. Under this alternative, management programs for migratory waterfowl, colonial nesting species, threatened and endangered species, and riparian communities would be expanded and improved. In addition to the major new projects listed under Alternative B, the Service would also:

- Construct a new dike across Unit 1 to improve efficiency of summer water management for colonial nesting birds;

The Planning Process

- Identify Public and Agency Issues
- Gather Data
- Develop Goals and Objectives
- Develop Management Strategies
- Evaluate Environmental Impacts
- Prepare Draft CCP/EA
- Public Review of Draft EA
- Public Notice of Decision





great-horned owl,
Larry Eifert

- Expand aerial surveys of waterfowl and ground surveys of shorebirds, waterbirds, raptors, and special status species;
- Expand habitat management for blunt-nosed leopard lizard and Tipton kangaroo rat using grazing, experimental burns, and increased monitoring;
- Strengthen levees around Unit 14 to protect adjacent uplands from flooding;
- Control salt cedar using mechanical, chemical, and /or biological means;
- Restore 440 acres of saltbush scrub in Unit 13;
- Plant a total of 15 acres of riparian vegetation east of Unit 14;
- Prepare a land protection plan which evaluate opportunities to protect and restore wetlands and associated threatened and endangered species habitat in the southern San Joaquin Valley;
- Prepare a comprehensive surveying and monitoring plan for special status species;
- Prepare an updated integrated pest management plan for salt cedar; and
- Prepare a grassland management plan.

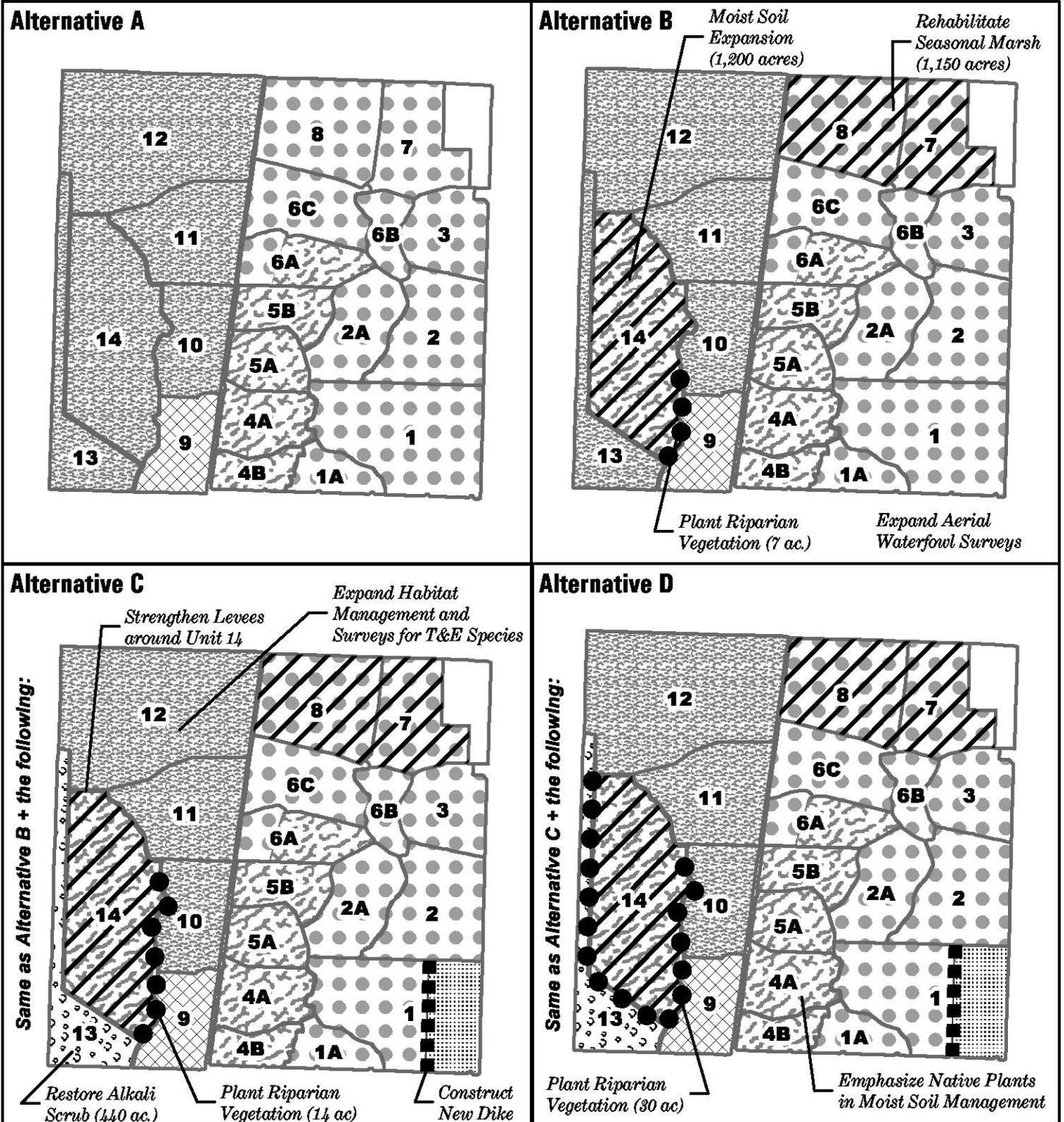
Visitor services would also be improved and expanded under Alternative C. For example, hunting opportunities would be increased by opening an additional 540 acres (Units 5a and 5b) to hunting and constructing 9 new hunting blinds. In addition to the visitor services projects listed under Alternative B, the Service would also:

- Develop new interpretive signs and displays and a new refuge brochure;
- Enhance the pond at the refuge entrance and construct a new kiosk and boardwalk;
- Construct a new 4.3 mile tour route (open every day);
- Construct a new photo blind; and
- Prepare a visitor services plan.

Under **Alternative D**, the Refuge focus would change to maximizing native biodiversity and contributing to the recovery of targeted special status species. Under this alternative, management programs for migratory waterfowl, colonial nesting species, threatened and endangered species, and riparian communities would be expanded and improved. New wildlife management projects under Alternative D would be the same as those under Alternative C except that the use of grazing to manage refuge grasslands/scrub would be phased out. Visitor services would be improved and expanded under this alternative, with the exception of the hunt program, which would be scaled back. Major new programs under this alternative would be the same as under Alternative C. In addition, the Service would also:



Kern NWR: Draft Habitat Management Alternatives

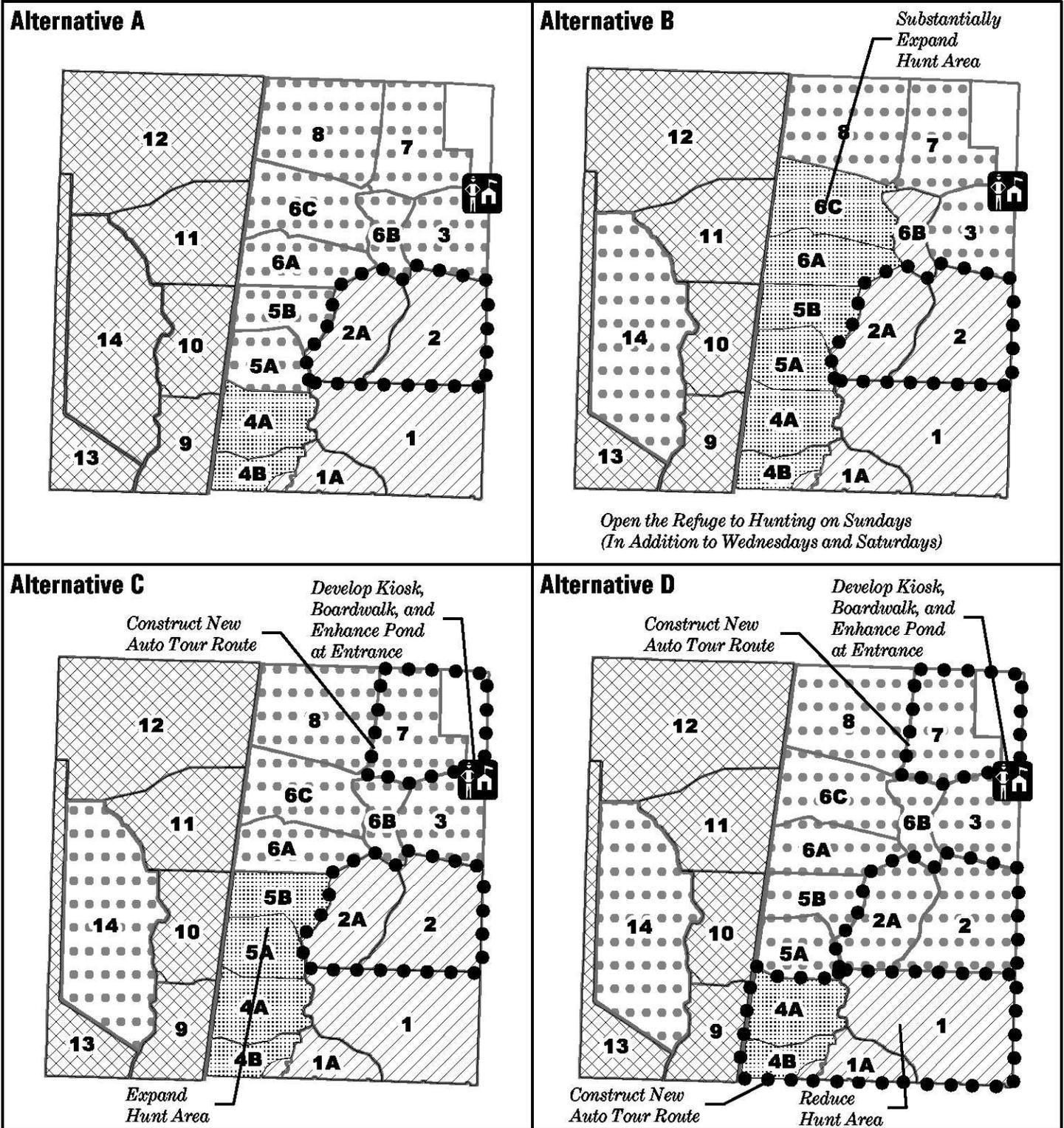


CA/NV Refuge Planning Office - April 2002



- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|----------------|--|---------------------------|
| | Alkali Scrub | | Riparian | | New Dike |
| | Grassland/Scrub/Playa | | Seasonal Marsh | | Riparian Expansion |
| | Moist Soil | | Summer Water | | Units to be Rehabilitated |

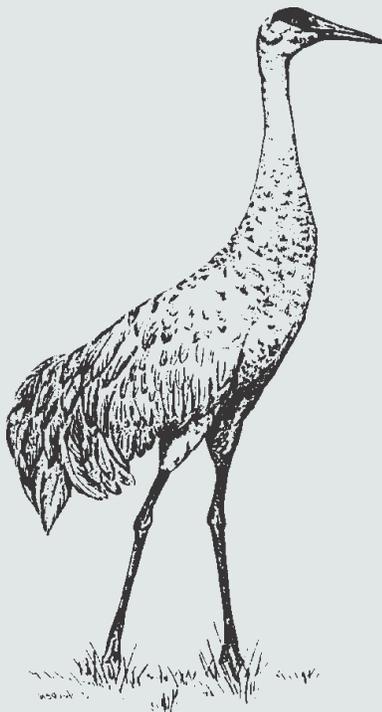
Kern NWR Draft Visitor Services Alternatives



CA/NV Refuge Planning Office - April 2002



- Free Roam Hunt Area
- Wetlands closed to hunting
- Hunt Area with blinds
- Other closed areas
- Interpretive Auto Tour Route
- Refuge Headquarters



sandhill crane, USFWS

- Plant a total of 30 acres of riparian vegetation around unit 14; and
- Construct a third tour route (7.4 miles); and
- Reduce the size of the free roam hunt area by 47 percent from 2,183 acres to 1,165 acres.

Pixley Refuge

Under the **Alternative A: No Action**, Pixley Refuge will continue to be managed as it has in the recent past. In general, management would be guided by the Master Plan adopted in 1986. The focus of the Refuge would remain the same: to contribute to the recovery of targeted special status species and provide wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl.

Under **Alternative B**, the focus of Pixley Refuge would also remain the same. However, management programs for threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and riparian communities would be improved and expanded. Major new projects under this alternative would include:

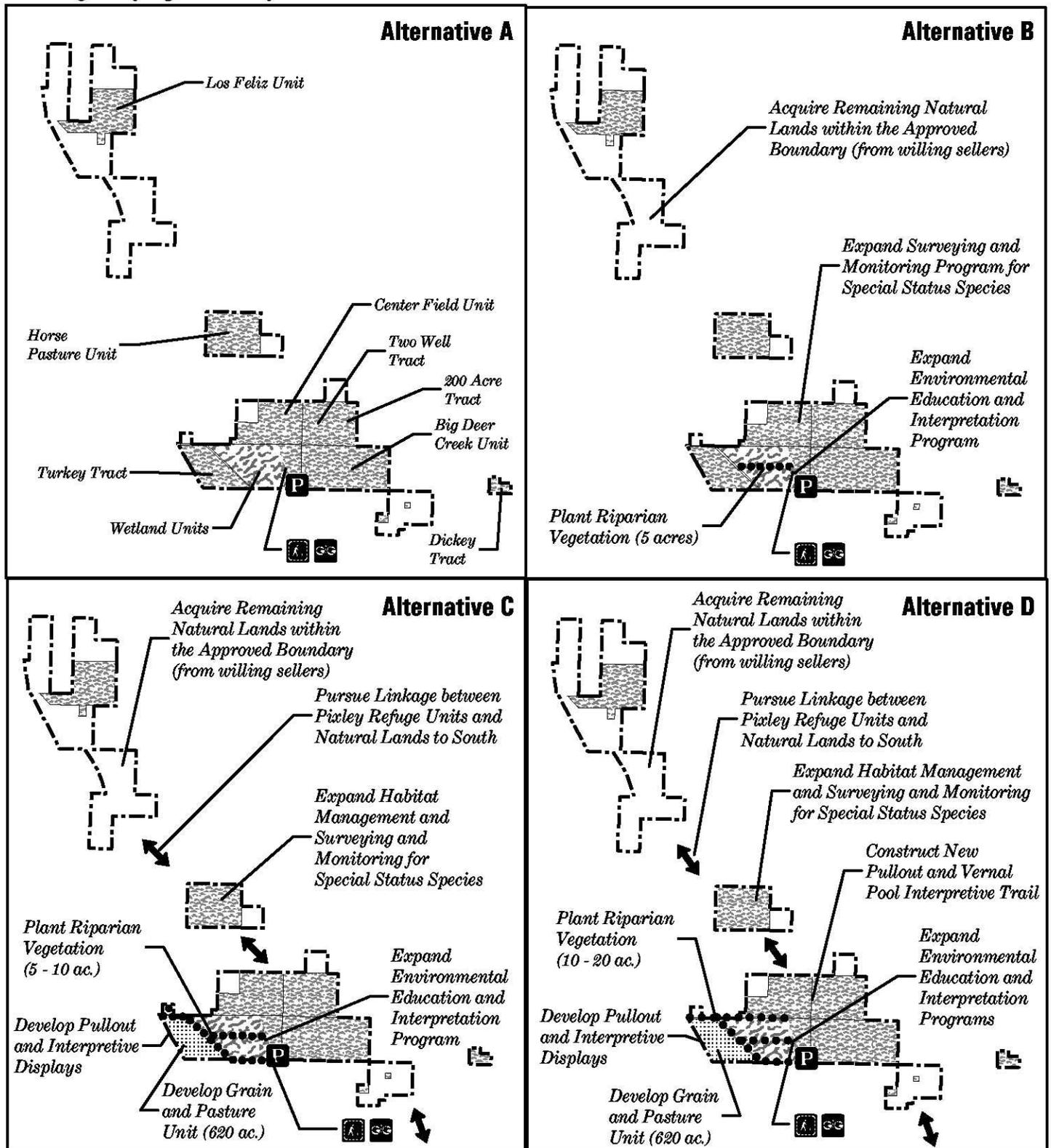
- Expand surveying and monitoring for threatened and endangered species and waterfowl;
- Acquire remaining natural lands within the approved refuge boundary from willing sellers;
- Plant 5 acres of riparian vegetation along the service ditch supplying the wetland Units;
- Expand environmental education and interpretation programs; and
- Prepare and implement a visitor services management plan.

Under **Alternative C**, the focus of Pixley Refuge would also remain the same. However, management programs for threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and riparian communities would be improved and expanded. Visitor services would also be improved and expanded under this alternative. In addition to implementing the major new projects listed under Alternative B, the Service would also:

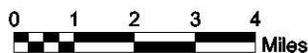
- Expand habitat management for Tipton kangaroo rat and blunt-nosed leopard lizard using grazing and experimental burns;
- Prepare a surveying and monitoring plan for special status species;
- Substantially expand research on the ecology and management of special status species;
- Prepare a land protection plan which evaluates alternatives for protecting and linking natural lands around the Refuge;
- Plant a total of 5 to 10 acres of riparian vegetation along the service ditch supplying the wetland units and along Deer Creek;



Pixley Refuge: Draft Alternatives



CA/NV Refuge Planning Office - April 2002



- Approved Refuge Boundary
- Riparian Expansion
- ☐☐ Observation Platform
- ☐ Parking Lot
- ☐ Interpretive Trail
- ☐ Grassland
- ☐ Moist Soil Wetlands
- ☐ Grain and Pasture

Who do I Contact?

If you would like more information about the refuge or this planning process, or would like to comment on the draft vision statements, please feel free to call, e-mail, or write us:

For information about the refuges:

David Hardt, Project Leader
Kern National Wildlife Refuge
Complex
P.O. Box 670
Delano, California 93216
Phone: (661) 725-2767
E-mail: dave_hardt@fws.gov

For information about the CCP:

Mark Pelz
CA/NV Refuge Planning Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way
Room W-1916
Sacramento, CA 95825
Phone: (916) 414-6504
Fax: (916) 414-6512
E-mail: mark_pelz@fws.gov

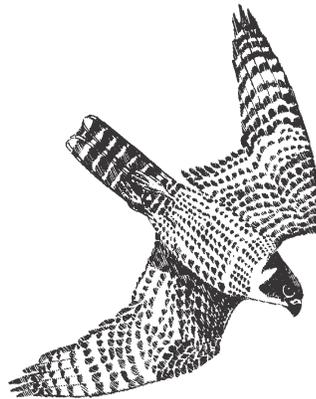
- Develop a 620 acre grain and pasture unit in the Turkey Tract;
- Develop a new auto pullout and interpretive display in the Turkey Tract; and
- Prepare a grassland restoration and management plan.

The focus of Pixley Refuge would change under **Alternative D** to: contributing to the recovery of targeted special status species and maximizing native biodiversity. This alternative would include all the major new projects listed under Alternative C. Under this alternative, the Service would also:

- Substantially modify management of moist soil units to maximize the diversity of native food plants and improve habitat for shorebirds.
- Develop a new auto pullout and interpretive vernal pool trail in the Two Well Tract.

What's Next

Our next task is to develop a draft CCP/EA for Kern and Pixley Refuges. We anticipate that the draft CCP/EA will be completed and mailed to you in the summer of 2002.



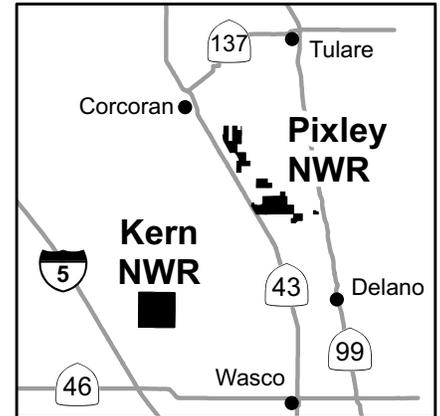


Kern Refuge Complex Update



Every spring, a variety of birds nest and rear young in the marshes of unit 1 which are flooded nearly year round. Species observed in the marsh this year include white-faced ibis, tri-colored blackbird, Virginia rail, American bittern, marsh wren, snowy egret, cattle egret, and black-crowned night heron. As the water in the moist-soil units is drawn down, it provides feeding habitat for thousands of shorebirds including long-billed dowitchers, least and western sandpipers, dunlins, black-bellied plovers, black-necked stilts, American avocets, greater yellowlegs, long-billed curlews, whimbrels, and common snipes. In addition, Kern Refuges' riparian habitat contains a great blue heron rookery consisting of about 25 nests.

On Pixley Refuge, the sandhill cranes and most of the waterfowl have migrated north by now and most of the wetlands have been drained to prepare the soil for the growth of next fall's waterfowl food plants. Some areas still have puddles of water that remain in formerly flooded units. Presently, these areas are attractive to several hundred ring-billed gulls, and shorebirds such as black-bellied plovers, American avocets, and black-necked stilts. In the riparian area along Deer Creek, Swainson's hawks and a few species of warblers may be seen as they migrate through the area. Other bird species that may be seen now are loggerhead shrikes, burrowing owls, northern harriers, black-tailed kites, horned larks, meadow larks, mourning doves, savannah sparrows, song sparrows, and northern orioles. Endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizards have emerged from hibernation and are occasionally seen in open grasslands along with side-blotched lizards, western whiptails, and coast horned lizards.



In a cooperative project with the Tulare County Audubon Society, Refuge staff opened a small portion of the Pixley Refuge to the public for the first time on June 2001. The areas opened include a small parking area, a 1.5 mile walking trail with 13 interpretive stops, 6 interpretive panels, and a 4 foot high observation platform which overlooks wetland habitat. The parking lot, trail, and observation platform are open from sunrise to sunset throughout the year.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish & Wildlife Service
 CA/NV Refuge Planning Office
 2800 Cottage Way, Room W-1916
 Sacramento, CA 95825-1846



Address correction requested